

June 5th, 2013

Chairperson LaFontaine and House Natural Resources Committee members:

As a concerned Michigan citizen and advocate of our state's natural resources, I urge you to oppose SB 163 as it is written today. As one is never more than 85 miles from one of the Great Lakes, or 6 miles from an inland lake, it is crucial that we continue to safeguard these lands that serve as ecological filters to our water systems. SB 163 does indeed possess provisions that deserve applause, such as implementing a transparent permit approval process that requires the application of reliable scientific principles and methods. However a number of ecological concerns remain evident.

Specifically, the changes to **Sec. 30305**, that allow for uses in a wetland without permit are particularly troublesome. Installation of utility lines (as newly defined), essentially including the act of creating extra passing lanes and allowing for existing location deviations to "maintain" permanent roads, and commercial excavation of lands on or adjacent to water bodies of one acre or more in size will lead to an inevitable net loss in substantial wetland habitat. Unfortunately, the bill also seeks to provide the option for developers to damage wetlands in one area, by mitigating loss in another, possibly unrelated landscape or function (**Sec.30311d (9)**). That sounds economically feasible, albeit not ecologically sound.

An equal and perhaps more substantial threat to wetlands and the in-state regulation Michigan currently enjoys, is the bill's language that leads to a more narrow definition of *contiguous* and it's exemption of agricultural drains. EPA policy requires that Michigan manage at least the amount that the federal government regulates. By releasing agricultural drains from Michigan's assessment, not only are we failing to monitor potential point-sources of excessive nitrate levels in our water bodies, we are reducing the amount of regulated wetlands necessary to meet federal policy standards.

I urge you to consider passing a bill that not only ensures Michigan's ability to regulate its wetlands habitat, but also our ability to maintain a healthy and functioning fresh water system that exemplifies us as "The Great Lakes State". Wetlands are vital to this vision. Please oppose SB 163 as it is written today. I ask that the bill be amended so that it may better reflect our natural heritage and future conservation endeavors.

Sincerely,

Adam Robarge
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109th District